PRESS RELEASE

Ombudsman probes problem of alleged illegal operation of kaito ferry service

The Ombudsman, Ms Winnie Chiu, today (15 July) announced the launch of a direct investigation to examine the problem of alleged illegal operation of kaito ferry service.

In recent years, with the outlying islands and rural coastal areas becoming popular spots for local tourism, there has been an increase in the demand for short-haul local marine transport services, such as kaito services.

Nevertheless, the media has reported from time to time on irregularities often found in such short-haul passenger services provided by local vessels, including operating kaito ferry services without a licence (commonly referred to as “white licence ferry services”), overloading, failing to provide sufficient life-saving appliances on board, violating the designated purposes of the relevant vessels, and more.

It is understood that the Marine Department is responsible for enforcing Hong Kong’s maritime legislation to regulate local vessels. In particular, all vessels used for carrying passengers are required to be properly licensed and adhere to the maximum passenger capacity as stipulated. The Transport Department is the regulator of ferry services, including kaito services, pursuant to the Ferry Services Ordinance.

Ms Chiu said, “Many people like to use kaito services for excursions to the outlying islands or countryside. However, there is a problem of vessels suspected of providing illegal kaito services, and the safety risks thus posed to the passengers should not be overlooked. The relevant authorities have the responsibility to ensure the safety of local marine transport. Hence, I have decided to initiate a direct investigation to examine whether the Marine Department and the Transport Department have put in place a regulatory system and taken actions against any illegal operations of kaito services adequately and effectively.”

The Ombudsman is inviting views from members of the public on this topic. Written submissions should reach the Office of The Ombudsman by 15 August 2021:

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